

Message Text

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ACTION OES-07

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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5414
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 2817

EO 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PBOR PCAT PEPR MASS EFIS MO UR
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON MOROCCAN-SOVIET FISHERIES ACCORD AND
RUMORED SOVIET ARMS OFFER

REF A. MOSCOW 1035, B. RABAT 2538, C. RABAT 2428

1. SUMMARY: SOVIET OFFICIALS HERE, AS WELL AS IN ALGERIA, HAVE BEEN QUICK TO DENY STORIES THAT THE RECENT MOROCCAN-SOVIET FISHERIES ACCORD INCLUDES ANY SOVIET RECOGNITION OF MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY IN WESTERN SAHARAN WATERS. WHILE VAGUE LANGUAGE NO DOUBT ALLOWS EACH SIDE ITS OWN INTERPRETATION, SEVERAL REPORTS SUGGEST THAT THE ACCORD MAY PROVIDE FOR OPERATIONS IN THE DISPUTED WATERS BY SOVIET VESSELS FLYING THE MOROCCAN FLAG. MOROCCAN SOURCES HAVE DENIED A SOVIET-MOROCCAN WEAPONS AGREEMENT, WHILE PLACING CREDENCE IN REPORTS OF SOVIET OFFERS TO SELL ARMS TO THE GOM. END SUMMARY.

2. FISHERIES ACCORD. SOVIET OFFICIALS IN MOROCCO, AS WELL
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AS ALGIERS, HAVE STRONGLY DENIED REPORTS SOURCED TO HIGH MOROCCAN OFFICIALS THAT THE USSR TACITLY RECOGNIZED MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER WESTERN SAHARAN WATERS IN THE APRIL 27 MOROCCAN-SOVIET FISHERIES ACCORD:
-- ON MAY 3, THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO MOROCCO TOLD THE WEST GERMAN AMBASSADOR THAT THE USSR DEFINITELY DOES NOT CONSIDER THE FISHERIES ACCORD AS SOVIET RECOGNITION OF

MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE SAHARA, ADDING THAT THE USSR WOULD QUOTE NEVER UNQUOTE DO THAT. HE SAID THAT MOROCCO CAN INTERPRET THE ACCORD AS IT WANTS, BUT THIS IS THE SOVIET INTERPRETATION.

-- ON MAY 3, THE SOVIET CONSUL GENERAL IN CASABLANCA TOLD A CONGEN CASABLANCA OFFICER THAT HE WAS CERTAIN THAT THE FISHERIES ACCORD DID NOT INCLUDE ANY RECOGNITION OF MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER SAHARAN WATERS, AND THAT SOVIET POLICY TOWARD THE SAHARA REMAINED UNCHANGED.

-- ACCORDING TO AFP ON MAY 7, THE ALGERIAN PRESS SERVICE REPORTED THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN ALGIERS INFORMED THE ALGERIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY THAT THE MOROCCAN-SOVIET FISHERIES ACCORD QUOTE DOES NOT CONCERN THE TERRITORIAL WATERS OF THE WESTERN SAHARA UNQUOTE AND HE REAFFIRMED SOVIET SUPPORT FOR QUOTE THE RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE SAHARAN PEOPLE UNQUOTE. (WE NOTE AMEMBASSY MOSCOW'S REPORT THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR MADE SIMILAR STATEMENTS TO HIS FRENCH COUNTERPART IN ALGIERS - REF A.)

3. THESE REPORTS, PLUS OTHER INFORMATION FROM MOROCCAN SOURCES, SUGGEST THAT THE ACTUAL TEXT OF THE ACCORD (WHICH HAS NOT BEEN RELEASED) IS SUFFICIENTLY VAGUE SO THAT EACH SIDE CAN SUPPORT ITS OWN INTERPRETATION. LOCAL CONTACTS HAVE INFORMED US THAT THERE IS NO SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO WESTERN SAHARAN WATERS IN THE TEXT AND THAT THE SOVIET VESSELS INVOLVED WILL OPERATE UNDER THE AUSPICES OF A JOINT COMPANY AND
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WILL FLY THE MOROCCAN FLAG, EVEN THOUGH THE CREWS WILL BE MOSTLY SOVIET. THESE ARRANGMENTS MAY PERMIT JOINT EXPLOITATION OF SAHARAN WATERS, WHICH ARE SAID TO CONTAIN THE RICHEST FISHERIES, WHILE ALLOWING THE SOVIETS TO MAINTAIN THEIR PUBLIC POSITION ON THE SAHARAN ISSUE. INDEED, ON MAY 11 A HIGH COMMUNIST PARTY (PPS) SOURCE TOLD US PRIVATELY THAT WHILE JURIDICALLY THE USSR DOES NOT RECOGNIZE MOROCCAN SOVEREIGNTY IN THE ACCORD, IT WILL AMOUNT TO RECOGNITION IN PRACTICE.

4. ARMS OFFERS. THE ISTIQLAL PARTY ARABIC LANGUAGE PAPER AL ALAM HAS REPRINTED A QUOTE MIDDLE EAST UNQUOTE MAGAZINE STORY THAT MOROCCO SIGNED AN AGREEMENT TO PURCHASE ARMS FROM THE USSR DURING PRIME MINISTER OSMAN'S MARCH VISIT TO MOSCOW. WE HAVE HEARD FROM ANOTHER SOURCE THAT THE SOVIETS OFFERED, DURING THE PHOSPHATE NEGOTIATIONS, TO SELL ARMS TO THE GOM, BUT THAT THE LATTER SHIED AWAY, FEARING FUTURE SOVIET LEVERAGE OVER GOM POLICY AND A VETO FROM SAUDI ARABIA, WHICH FOOTS A LARGE PROPORTION OF THE MOROCCAN DEFENSE BILL. ON MAY 11, THE PREVIOUSLY CITED PPS SOURCE COMMENTED PRIVATELY THAT MOROCCO HAD AN OPEN OFFER TO PURCHASE SOVIET OR EAST EUROPEAN WEAPONS WHENEVER IT CHOSE TO DO SO. (COMMENT: EMBASSY CONCURS WITH THE REASONING THAT THE GOM

WILL FOR PRESENT SHY AWAY FROM ANY MAJOR SOVIET ARMS
DEALS. HOWEVER, THE GOM MAY BE INTERESTED IN ACQUIRING
SPARE PARTS FOR SOVIET ARMS PURCHASED IN THE 1960S. WE
UNDERSTAND THAT A SOVIET SHIP ARRIVED IN MOROCCAN WATERS ON
MAY 12 AND 18 TONS OF UNSPECIFIED GOODS FOR THE F.A.R.
THIS IS THE FIRST SOVIET DELIVERY OF ANY KIND
TO THE MOROCCAN ARMED FORCES SINCE JANUARY 1977.)
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